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THE DARK FLOWER

THE DARK FLOWER

By

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THE DARK FLOWER

PART I

SPRING

I

He walked along Holywell that afternoon of early June with his short gown drooping down his arms, and no cap on his thick dark hair. A youth of middle height, and built as if he had come of two very different strains, one sturdy, the other wiry and light. His face, too, was a curious blend, for, though it was strongly formed, its expression was rather soft and moody. His eyes—dark grey, with a good deal of light in them, and very black lashes—had a way of looking beyond what they saw, so that he did not seem always to be quite present; but his smile was exceedingly swift, uncovering teeth as white as a negro's, and giving his face a peculiar eagerness. People stared at him a little as he passed—since in eighteen hundred and eighty he was before his time in not wearing a cap. Women especially were interested; they perceived that he took no notice of them, seeming rather to be looking into distance, and making combinations in his soul.

Did he know of what he was thinking—did he ever know quite definitely at that time of his life, when things, especially those beyond the immediate horizon, were so curious and interesting?—the things he was going to see and do when he had got through Oxford, where everybody was "awfully decent" to him and "all right," of course, but not so very interesting.

He was on his way to his tutor's to read an essay on Oliver Cromwell; and under the old wall, which had once hedged in the town, he took out of his pocket